

One Autumn Day

by megzela

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Summary: Several years after the Battle at Hogwarts, Hermione spots a man who looks just like Severus Snape. But it couldn't be him - he died in the battle... right?

1. Portobello Road

A/N: Guys... I can't stay away! I am trying to write other things, but story ideas for these characters keep popping into my head. I will try to write/post as often as possible but bear with me, please! Life is busy but I promise to get these chapters up ASAP :)

I of course own none of these characters or this world they live in. I make no money from this, just love it!

* * *

><p>It had been almost 23 years since the battle at Hogwarts. Rose was currently in her fourth year at the wizarding school, and Hugo had recently begun his second year. Hermione and Ron had, as usual, accompanied their children to King's Cross Station to ensure they got on the train and to say their good-byes.</p>

This year had been especially hard on Hermione â€“ and it had only been about a month since they left! She felt older this year for some reason even more than she had felt at her 40th birthday last year and the house was feeling larger and quieter than ever. The small moments of peace that she and Ron had enjoyed while the kids were around (such as reading the paper, curling up with a good book, gardeningâ€¦ or in Ron's case, working on model Quidditch sets), were now routine and comfortable, but left the pair spending very little time together throughout their days. Often the only time they really spent together was the weekly double date with Ginny and Harry.

One particularly beautiful autumn day, she called in to work and decided to spend the day roaming around London for a bit of a change.

She dressed casually in an oversized and especially soft, gray woolen sweater, a comfortable pair of jeans, and some well-worn black wellies.

Stepping out into the cool air, she took a moment to turn her face to the sun and take a deep breath of crisp autumn air before Apparating away. Upon arriving in a back alley near Portobello Road, she smoothed out her sweater, tucked her wand in her sleeve and set out in search of a good bookstore.

A few hours later, as the sun was beginning its slow descent of the afternoon, Hermione strolled leisurely back down the road towards her Apparition point with a shrunken package of books under one arm and a neatly wrapped bundle containing quills, parchment, a few special seeds for her garden and her favorite tea in her other hand. She had just decided to pop into GAIL's Artisan Bakery for a quick bite when a dark figure stopped her in her tracks.

The man walking the opposite direction across the street from her was tall, thin, and pale. She squinted at him, marveling at the similarities between this man and her former Potions Professor. The man's hair was shorter and a bit unkempt, sporting strands of gray here and there. His face was long and thin but the nose was smaller â€“ not the beak that Professor Snape's students had joked about behind his back.

She gazed nostalgically at the man for a few moments, remembering the kind words Harry had said about him at the small ceremony they held at Hogwarts for all the deceased. At that moment, the man glanced over and his eyes met hers. It gave her pause, the way the man's eyebrows subtly rose, and his eyes narrowed at her. It was only a moment but it felt as if it was happening in slow motion. Hermione's brow wrinkled as she stared at the man that was a shockingly accurate doppelganger to Severus. As if he sensed her thoughts, he turned his head away sharply, and quickly strode away, turning down a side street. She felt an urge to follow him, but common sense stopped her and instead she continued to the Bakery.

As she sat enjoying her scone and tea, she contemplated the man she had seen. It was impossible that it was, in fact, their old Professor. Could it be that he had a brother? Or a cousin, perhaps? She made a mental note to make inquiries as she wandered thoughtfully back to her Apparition point.

* * *

><p>AN: I know, I know it's short! Sorry!

2. Seeking Answers

A/N: Thank you to the reviewers! I love reading every one of them and try my best to respond to each as well. Hope you enjoy!

* * *

><p>Hermione yawned over her morning toast. It was a rainy Thursday and she had gotten too little sleep. It had been a bit over a week since she had looked into Severus's lineage and she was expecting a response any day now. She had been deep in thought most of the night

about the man she had seen. She was probably being ridiculous. Most likely he was some odd Muggle and she had simply made up the similarities.<p>

She was pulled out of her thoughts by Ron, who had cleared his throat loudly. Looking over at him, she noticed he was leaning on the table, gazing quizzically back at her.

"I'm sorry, did I miss something?" She asked.

"I asked you if you wanted to have lunch with me today."

"Oh! Erm, I'm not sure what all I have to do this morning, but I'll get back to you."

With that, he nodded, rose from the table and gave her a quick peck on the cheek as he headed out the door. She sat for a few more minutes, finishing her tea, before following suit.

The morning ended up being quite busy but for whatever reason, she couldn't stop thinking about the man she had seen in London. It was bothering her so much that a bit before her regular lunch hour, she decided to pop back over to the same area on Portobello Road to see if she could spot him again.

A short while later, Hermione was strolling down Portobello Road with a sandwich from GAIL'S, trying to look at the vendors goods along the way but she really was scanning the lunch crowd for the man she remembered. It was nearing the end of her break and she was just about to give up when she finally caught sight of him. He was coming out of Oxfam Books, a paper package in his long hand. She ducked behind a display and watched him.

She definitely hadn't made up the similarities. Clear as day she could see the sharp eyes that didn't miss a thing, the long pale face, large nose and that indifferent yet superior expression that Severus had worn so often. She watched him move gracefully through the large crowd, never drawing attention to himself, and hunching over his package. Against her better judgement, she set out to follow him.

Keeping a safe distance back, she tailed him down the road almost to Kensington Gardens. He disappeared around a corner, yet when Hermione rounded the same corner, she couldn't see him anywhere. With a frown, she slowly turned and started making her way back. As she went, she couldn't shake the distinct feeling she was being watched.

Later that afternoon, she received a message from the Realtor she had spoken to. It read that while there was no name of who sold the house on Spinner's End, there was a forwarding address. The Realtor wrote that they were under strict instruction not to share the address, but since Hermione was a close family friend (she may have exaggerated in her inquiry just a bit), she felt comfortable releasing the information.

She immediately grabbed a length of parchment and began a letter.

Dear Madam or Sir, _

I do hope this letter finds you well. I was given your address by a friend and wanted to inquire about your connection to the house on Spinner's End that most recently belonged to a Mr. Severus Snape.

My name is Hermione Granger and I used to be a student of his. I recently have been thinking about him and wondered if he had any family surviving, which is why I am writing to you.

_Do you know of any family, or are you a member of the family? Please forgive me for what I __**do**__ realize is a bit of an invasive letter._

I look forward to hearing from you, and do hope you might give me some good news.

Respectfully,

Hermione Granger

She sent off the letter and finished her work day, forcing herself to concentrate on each task rather than thinking of who might write her back. Soon it was time to leave and she gathered up her things, headed for home and finally losing herself to her thoughts.

"Hey, busy work day?" Ron asked as soon as she shut their front door.

"Not particularly, why?"

"You never met me for lunch." Hermione's mind raced.

"Oh no, where was I supposed to meet you?"

"Nowhere, you'd just said you'd contact me and I never heard from you."

"Oh, Ron," Hermione's heart sank. "I'm so sorry, I just got lost in a project and forgot all about it." Ron nodded and turned back to his paper, but she could see the hurt written on his face.

"I'll just go take a bath. Can you manage for dinner? There's leftovers." She said, rubbing a kink out of her neck. Ron nodded absently so she left the room and made her way to the bathroom.

While sitting in the warm, fragrant water, she let her mind wander. It's plenty likely that the person she had written to was of no relation, but then who were they? And what, really, was she hoping to accomplish or learn? She wasn't quite sure she knew the answer to that question, so instead she sank lower in the tub and relived that horrible moment in which she saw her Professor die. It would forever be etched into her memory, that vision of him as life left him. They had seen him take his last breath, seen his body stillâ€¦ hadn't they?

She suddenly sat up straight, sloshing water all over the tiled floor. Could he have lived? He was, after all, a double agent. Had he come up with some elaborate plan? Her mind was racing, thinking of all the ways he could possibly have faked his death when she realized

how ridiculous she sounded.

"Get a grip, Hermione." She grumbled to herself as she shook her head. With a quick wave of her wand, soothing music filled the room and Hermione let her mind go blank.

3. Letters

Ms. Granger;

You are correct in thinking your letter was invasive as I am no relative of his. Neither do I have any information regarding the family.

-M.B.

* * *

><p>Hermione slumped back against her desk chair, not disappointed as you might thinkâ€¦but furious. She had been polite in her letter, why could this man or woman not return the favor? She had half a mind to go in person to the address listed, but instead picked up a quill and scribbled away ferociously.

M.B.;

_I do apologize if my letter was upsetting to you, however, your response does me no good. I want to know how you came in possession of it to sell. I know it belonged to a Tobias Snape for several years before it transferred to his son, Severus. _

I simply am seeking answers.

Cordially,

Hermione Granger

* * *

><p>Ms. Granger;

Why?

M.B.

* * *

><p>M.B.;

Consider it a last respect for the dead.

Hermione Granger

* * *

><p>Ms. Granger;

How do you know the man deserves a last respect?

M.B.

* * *

><p>M.B. ;

I would consider that a personal question, but, I do believe he deserves it. He was quite a good teacher, you see, though an incredibly harsh one as well. He also did a number of wonderful deeds. He was a good man. And a brave one.

Now will you tell me if you knew him or his family?

Hermione Granger

* * *

><p>Ms. Granger;

I did know him. Not well â€“ we were simply acquaintances. So you can guess my surprise when a lawyer showed up at my front door informing me that a house of Severus's had been left to me.

I cannot say if Severus was a good or brave man but regardless, all I know of the family is that his parents died several years ago and I was given the house the month after he himself died.

M.B.

* * *

><p>M.B. ;

I can imagine that would be quite a shock.

He had no wife or children then, I take it? How did you meet him? What was he like in day to day life?

Hermione Granger

* * *

><p>Ms. Granger;

No. Not that it's any of your business but I met him at a potions seminar. I imagine he was quite like what you remember.

M.B.

* * *

><p>Hermione sat in her home office, putting down the last message from "M.B." She still had so many questions but it didn't seem as though this man was eager to help, nor did it sound like he had much information to give. She chuckled a moment, thinking they must have bonded over their gruffness. On the upside, now that she knew he was a wizard, she could start using her owl rather than muggle mail.<p>

After standing and stretching, she made her way down to their kitchen to prepare dinner. Ron was going to be late as he and Harry were stopping for a drink, but she wanted to have a hot meal on the table for him when he returned.

She stood at the stove, stirring some pasta sauce absentmindedly as she thought of the letters she had been exchanging with this 'acquaintance' of Severus's. She considered Severus attending a seminar and talking to others afterwards. She wondered what he had been like outside of the classroom — he certainly would have been different. She couldn't imagine him intimidating a room full of other masters of the craft. She snorted imagining the sight of Severus sneering at a room full of grumpy men.

"What's funny?" A voice asked behind her.

Hermione whirled around to find Ron entering the kitchen, pulling open the collar of his shirt and running a hand through his coppery hair.

"Oh nothing. How was work?" Hermione turned back to the stove after giving Ron a small smile. There was a pause before she heard one of the dining chairs scrape across the floor and a sigh as Ron sat on it.

"Same as usual, nothing too exciting. You?"

"Same. Ready for tomorrow?"

"Always am!"

Hermione drained the pasta and put together some plates, then they ate in near silence before retreating to the living room. Ron kept a television in there — he said it was for the kids, but she knew better. She chose to select a good book and cuddle up on some cushions near the fireplace while Ron watched some comedy show for a while before falling asleep on the sofa.

The next day was Saturday and it was the day they always met Ginny and Harry for lunch and drinks at The Three Broomsticks Inn. Hermione always looked forward to this day. Sure Harry and Ron had been her best friends for decades but once the battle was over and Ginny and Harry started dating, it felt as though she had always been a part of their little group. Hermione enjoyed her time catching up with Harry but also loved having another girl to talk to — about the children, or new hair products Ginny had found to help tame Hermione's frizz or a number of other things only women could properly discuss.

She did, however, want to do one thing before they headed out for their day. Picking up a quill and some ink, she set out to respond to M.B.'s last letter.

* * *

><p>M.B. ;

_Might I ask what the initials stand for? I admit I have been thinking of you as a man, but cannot be sure with the use of the initials rather than a name. _

I highly doubt he was how I remember him with you or other peers of his. The very short amount of time I saw him outside the classroom was odd. He was so intimidating as a Professor, yet seemed almost docile as a man. I so wish I could have gotten to know him better, he seems like a puzzle to me now._

Hermione Granger

* * *

><p>She sent it off hoping for a more detailed response, and went downstairs to join Ron. They spent the afternoon stuffing themselves and drinking, rounding out the night at Harry and Ginny's place that evening. Harry and Ron ventured into the kitchen for a nightcap and a game of Wizard's Chess while the women curled up in plush armchairs in front of the fire and sipped some hot mulled cider.<p>

"How are you doing, Hermione?" She looked over at Ginny, who seemed to be wearing a look of concern.

"Fine! It's always difficult when the children leave, but they write every so often." Ginny nodded sympathetically.

"Lily just started and now I feel useless with no one in the house needing me!"

"Except Harry of course!" Hermione teased. Ginny laughed and agreed.

"But besides being a mum with her children off at schoolâ€¦how are you?"

"I'm fine, Ginny. Why do you ask?" Ginny shook her head and furrowed her brow.

"I don't know what it is exactly but something is different about you."

"I've had a lot going on at work. A new project as well. Actuallyâ€"" Hermione almost began to tell Ginny about her letters to M.B. when the boys burst in.

"Hermione, you'd better take this poor bloke home! His pride is going to need nursing after the beating I just gave him!" Harry laughed as he made his way to Ginny and slipped his arms around her.

"I let you win." Ron grumbled.

"Sure you did, mate."

Hermione shot Ginny an exasperated look and got an eye roll in return.

"Will it ever end?" She asked.

"It's not looking good." Ginny replied. They all shared another laugh and said their goodbyes before Flooing home.

A/N: Just a reminder, I own nothing! Unfortunately ;)

* * *

><p>Their first few letters went back and forth so quickly, Hermione found herself becoming more and more anxious to receive a response as the days went by. Life went on as normal for her â€“ wake up, go to work, make dinner, read, write a bit more in her weekly letters to the kidsâ€¦ but she couldn't make herself stop thinking about the man in London. It became a bit of an obsession, even she could admit it. Twice more she'd convinced herself she wanted a sandwich from the same bakery on Portobello Road to look for him, and twice she'd been disappointed in the lack of the man who resembled Severus.<p>

She was sitting at her desk, head resting on her hand as she read through a proposal when the next letter arrived. She immediately lost her concentration on the task at hand and eagerly opened the message.

* * *

><p>Ms. Granger;

M.B. stands for Miles Brighton. I trust that clears up any question of gender.

Docile is an accurate description. He never quite stood out â€“ he did well at blending in and remaining a part of the crowd. Perhaps he wasn't quite sure how to act.

**As I have revealed my name to you, it's only fair that you reveal to me if you are, in fact, the Hermione Granger whose name often graced the pages of The Daily Prophet all those years ago. Still close with Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley? **

**M.B. **

Miles Brighton

* * *

><p>After reading his words, Hermione paused a moment. Wasn't sure how to act? Did Miles know about his role in the battle? She'd have to find a way to delicately ask. A scene of Severus at the table during an Order meeting at Grimmauld Place played out in her mind; he always sat ramrod straight, hands folded before him. He also always wore an expressionless mask, other than a slight distaste when glancing in Remus's or Sirius's direction.<p>

Frowning, she realized that she had noticed he didn't often make eye contact with the Order members. She wondered why that was. Suddenly, all these years later, her former Professor was a puzzling character and she wished she had known him better.

* * *

><p>Mr. Brighton;

_Pleased to meet you, it's a lovely name. _

He remains such a puzzle to me. For whatever reason, I cannot stop my mind from questioning everything about him. He was a bit elusive, you see, and being pulled in a few different directions. Ultimately he made the right decisions and was released from his burdens. Did you know much about his professional life or otherwise?

I am indeed that Ms. Granger that you are thinking. That was a trying time, us all being teenagers and having barely escaped the battle with our lives, to be thrust into the media so heavily. But I am still very close with the boys.

In the spirit of introducing ourselves, might I ask where you practice your potions? Do you teach? Or sell, perhaps?

Hermione

* * *

><p>Ms. Granger;

That was a poorly hidden question about his role in the battle. I do know about his poor judgment and double crossing, though only through The Daily Prophet articles about him. I understand that he was mentioned at the service for the fallen â€“ that must have been a terrible failure.

Well, The Daily Prophet has never been above exploitation. I can understand how at such a young age that would be difficult. Do I remember correctly seeing that you had married, as well?

**I brew for Slug and Jiggers, as well as private clients. **

What line of work are you in?

Miles Brighton

* * *

><p>Mr. Brighton;

I must admit I am never one to be very good at subtlety. However, on the contrary, the service was beautiful and a few witches and wizards stood up and paid their respects for Severus. Though The Prophet made him out to be a villain, there are still many of us who consider him a hero.

You are correct; Ronald and I married just a couple years after the war.

I am the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement at the Ministry.

Hermione Granger

* * *

><p>MRS. WEASLEY

I have been addressing you incorrectly, it seems. Perhaps this is out of line, but I had imagined you'd have married Mr. Potter.

That must be quite a taxing occupation.

Miles Brighton

* * *

><p>This went on for a few more weeks. They learned about each other which, in turn, helped Hermione a bit. Miles had worked in potions his whole life and while he had other hobbies and interests, this had always remained a passion of his. He enjoyed classical music, a good stiff drink before bed and was an avid reader.</p>

The more Hermione learned about him, the more she wanted to know. His letters were less gruff as time went on and she enjoyed the conversation. She wasn't sure why she had kept writing himâ€|perhaps it was just the lack of the children being around that made her want to seek conversation. One could never have too many companions, right?

Every year for Halloween, the foursome got together at Hermione and Ron's house for dinner, drinks, and often they made a weekend of it with Ginny and Harry staying in the guest room. This year would be no different. Hermione was making a pot roast and some rolls for dinner and Molly Weasley had sent along Harry's favorite desert earlier in the day.

"Hello?" Ginny's voice sounded from the entry way.

"In the kitchen!" Hermione called back. Ginny came bouncing into the kitchen with rosy cheeks and bright eyes.

"I just got back from watching the boys' Quidditch game." She said breathlessly.

"Oh! How did they do?"

"Won, of course. They are my children after all." Ginny boasted. Harry and Ron walked in from the living room just then.

"Your children? I suppose my superior Quidditch skills had nothing to do with their talent?" Harry asked with a twinkle in his eye. Ginny walked over to him and hugged his side.

"Oh, Harry. You know I could beat you any day of the week." With that, Harry threw his head back and laughed heartily, as Ginny planted a small kiss on his neck. Hermione looked over at Ron and smiled, amused. Ron lifted an eyebrow and shook his head â€" those two were hopelessly competitive when it came to Quidditch.

As soon as the food was all finished, they sat down and ate their fill, washing it down with some ale. Once they were finished, Hermione waved her wand to start the plates washing and they all moved into the living room for cards, chess and conversation.

Later that night, Hermione was tossing and turning in bed. Something was keeping her awake but she couldn't quite figure out what it was.

Suddenly a noise at the window made her gasp. Ron bolted up and looked around.

"What was that?" He asked with wide eyes. Hermione stifled a giggle.

"It's just an owl, Ron. Go back to bed." Ron nodded sleepily and slide back under the covers, falling asleep instantly. Hermione crept over to the window and opened it, letting in the standard issue owl. He dropped a tattered letter into her hand and flew off importantly.

Who on earth would be writing her at this hour? She glanced over and saw that it was about three in the morning. Moving as quietly as possibly, she made her way down to the living room and opened it by the fire.

* * *

><p>Hermione;

Do you mind if I call you Hermione? I don't wish to call you by your married name any longer. We've become closer than that, haven't we? Even if we haven't, I would like to call you by your first name.

In response to your last letter, no I do not have a family. My parents died several years ago and I never found someone to share my life with. I am a man who enjoys solitude but tonight is an exception. This evening finds me in a worn armchair next to a dying fire, glass of whiskey in my hand and a yearning for conversation; Hence my letter to you. Is it late? I'm not sure of the time.

Hermione's forehead wrinkled. His writing seemed odd. He was rambling more than usual and revealing quite a bit more than usual. Andâ€¢what was that smell? She sniffed the air and then sniffed the letter, pulling it back abruptly from her face when she realized it smelled heavily of alcohol. He must've been very drunk when he wrote this. Taking a breath, she continued on.

We haven't been acquainted long, haven't even met face-to-face, but I find myself wishing you were here to chat with. I don't have many friends, probably because I'm not very good at it. Now that it occurs to me, why have you continued writing me? You got your answer that I didn't know this man's family or other information about him â€“ you could have, and should have, ended all communication then. You still can, you know. I would understand.

Are you lonely as well?

-Miles

* * *

><p>Hermione leaned back against the cushions and thought. Was she lonely? She thought about her mornings of Ron reading the paper as she read whatever book she was currently interested in, evenings spent on their own, how much she looked forward to the dates with Ginny and Harry and how much she missed the children. She wandered

over to her desk and sat, absent mindedly picking up a quill and considering his question.<p>

* * *

><p>Dear Miles,

You may of course call me Hermione. I do indeed consider you a friend as you have continued to respond to my letters and introduced yourself to me over time. I like the man I am getting to know.

_Am I lonely? Yes, I suppose I am. _

Your friend,

Hermione

5. Vanished

Hermione,

May I still call you that? I confess I do not remember much of what I wrote to you last. I do apologize if it was out of line.

A friend, you say? I cannot imagine why you would want me as a friend. I am a gruff, lonely old man, as I am sure I must have said in my last letter. And youâ€¦ you have so much more going for you. Why you would want to converse with someone like me is baffling.

Why, if I might ask, are you lonely?

-Miles

* * *

><p>Hermione read Miles's last missive and felt her heart ache for the poor man. He obviously was going through a hard time. Sitting back in her chair she wondered how to respond and spotted the clock. It was already a quarter past her lunch hour! She began to lean down for her packed lunch but stopped halfway. She hadn't been to Portobello Road in a while. She made a split moment decision, grabbed her jacket and rushed out of her office.<p>

A few minutes later she was strolling quickly through Kensington Gardens. Pausing only briefly at a food vendor, she made her way to a shaded bench near the road where her mystery man had disappeared so suddenly. _Even if I don't see him, _Hermione mused, _I've spent a nice lunch outdoors. _

No sooner than the thought had crossed her mind, however, did the man in black round the corner across the street from her. Hunched over, hands shoved deep into his pockets, he strode down the walk with purpose. Not with a confidence per say, but certainly wasn't lacking it. His slightly graying hair was a bit untidy, a thin gray scarf trailing behind him and his clothes wrinkled and stained.

She frowned, wondering if perhaps he was in a bad way â€“ needing help. But a few doors down, he turned and walked up a short set of

steps and up to one of the apartment house's entrances. It wasn't a run-down looking place, so he must be doing alright.

Just as he was presumably unlocking the door, he suddenly straightened. Then slowly his head turned to the left, attempting a subtle look over his shoulder in her general direction. She quickly slouched in her seat, obscuring her face with her hand. She held her breath a few beats and then risked a peek through her hands " he was gone. She glanced around quickly but it was no use. The doors were all identical and she couldn't recall which one he had been standing in front of. It mightn't have even been his, _she thought. Disappointed, she headed back to work, squinting up at the windows as she went, but seeing nothing. Yet, once again, she couldn't shake the feeling that she was being watched.

That night, Hermione went about her routine as usual. Then, once they retired to the bedroom, she had feigned falling asleep first " waiting until Ron was snoring deeply to sneak out from under the covers and downstairs to her desk.

She sat and picked up her quill thoughtfully. This was the most difficult letter to answer so far. She wasn't sure how best to assure him of her growing fondness for his letters or how best to address the question of being lonely. It was somewhat of a loaded question, she supposed. She didn't want to imply she was unhappy, because she wasn't. Butâ€| something did make her yearn for this man's companionship.

* * *

><p>Dear Miles,

You may call me Hermione " in fact, I would prefer it; as long as you don't mind me using your first name as well. I'm quite certain we've been acquainted long enough for this to be appropriate. In addition, I feel as though I already know you, though we've never actually met. There's something enticing about that, isn't there? Knowing someone simply through parchment and ink? Perhaps that was inappropriate, but I have always found writing to be especially fulfilling._

Unless it bothers you for some reason, I would indeed consider you my friend. We may not know each other very well, but I like the man I've come to know, and I look forward to hearing from you. Besides, after the war, what better thing can we do than befriend one another?_

I don't really know why I said I was lonely. I mean, I suppose I am, but it's not as if I'm without people I love in my life. I have a husband and two best friends I see quite often in terms of socialization. It may just be that I have gotten caught up in routine too heavily and am yearning for a change. A holiday, perhaps. Something. I suppose one might say I am in a rut._

And you, Miles? What makes you lonely? _

-Hermione_

* * *

><p>Several days passed before she got a response. During that time she began noticing just how distant she and Ron had become. She made efforts to do more, plan outings and whatnot, but they were both so stuck in their ways. She always stayed at work late on Mondays to catch up from the weekend, Ron and Harry always went out on Tuesdays, Ginny and Hermione had girl's night on Wednesdays, they had their double dates on Saturdays, and family dinner at Molly and Arthur's on Sundays. Adding in take-home work from time to time with both of them, books Hermione wanted to finish or a model set that Ron wanted to assemble and it left precious little opportunity to spend time together.<p>

One Wednesday late in November, she and Ginny did their holiday shopping. They made a day of it â€“ taking the day off of work, visiting Hogsmeade and various shops in London, stopping for lunch and rounding out the day at Henry Gregory Antiques and Vintage. After Hermione had made her purchase, they said their goodbyes and Ginny walked up the road. Hermione started walking toward her regular Apparition spot in the opposite direction when she suddenly paused, focused on the road ahead of her. She wasn't far from the set of apartments she had seen the mystery man go up to. She bit her lip and let her curiosity get the better of her.

She walked quickly, eyes darting this way and that as she went, keeping watch for the man. She came to the corner and rounded it in a flash, stopping short as she reached the first door. She knew he hadn't gone in the first or the last entrance, so she'd have to check all the names on the ones between. She moved through the first two quickly. When she got to the third, she'd barely glanced down at the name listing when someone grabbed her from behind.

Her first instinct was to panic, to fight, to screamâ€¦but the man had anticipated all of them. His strong arms held hers painfully twisted behind her back and a large hand clamped over her mouth. A raspy, strangled voice came from her attacker, breath hot on her neck.

"Stop following me. Or you'll regret it." The voice hissed.

And just like that, he was gone. Vanished. The only thing that remained was the soreness in her shoulders and a racing heart.

6. Coming Clean

**Hermione, **

**Enticing? Perhaps. Also a risk. There is something to be said for the way a person looks, acts, behavesâ€¦ body language is also a very good recourse when learning about someone. None of these are granted to you when purely writing to someone. **

For example, I highly doubt you might have anticipated from our correspondence that I myself have a shadowed past. When you say after the war we should befriend one another â€“ do you mean even those you had been fighting against?

Something for you to consider.

**Should you for some reason still be reading this, I shall continue

with my earnestness and say that you seem lonely despite your loved ones; which may in fact mean they are not as close to your heart as you had thought.**

I am lonely for the reasons I have stated here. I have a dark past and a bleak future. Enough sense to know it would be wrong to draw anyone close and therefore drag them down with me, but still stupid enough to long for companionship if only to help the hours pass.

-Miles

* * *

><p>Miles,

You were a Death Eater? Please tell me it isn't true.

If it isâ€¦why?

Hermione

* * *

><p>Hermione,

**You answered my letter. You surpassed my expectations â€" a feat not easily accomplished. **

**Let me ask you this: have you ever felt different? Strange? Like you didn't fit in anywhere, not even your own home? And then someone somewhere accepts you simply for being you. It doesn't matter why or what part of you they may be after specifically, just that finally you fit somewhere. That is what happened to me. The Death Eaters may have been terrible people, but you cannot deny the comradery within â€" at least there was during the first Wizarding War; the second not as much. **

When you feel that inclusion, it is hard to separate their ideas from your own. You soon begin to accept what they say or believe as fact â€" they begin to become **_*friend*_*_.

Do I now believe in what they were trying to accomplish? No. But that doesn't exactly make me innocent, now does it.

I bid you farewell, **_*friend*_*_.

-M.B.

* * *

><p>Miles,

_I so hope this letter still finds you. I hope you haven't done something foolish. I also hope you don't reject my letter. _

_What was the defeat of Voldemort worth if we cannot forgive one another now that he is gone? It's the same, don't you see? Rejecting

someone due to their blood status vs. rejecting someone based on past mistakes. Neither one can be changed or altered. They don't make you a better or worse person._

It may interest you to know that I am all too familiar with what it is like to feel out of place. I've always been an outcast â€“ that is, until I met Harry and Ron. They accepted me freely and that led to confidence. So, will I reject you? Never. You were and are my friend, Miles.

_Would it be out of line to ask if you wanted to meet one day?

—

Hermione

* * *

><p>Hermione,

You give me far more credit than I deserve.

While I cannot say I wouldn't enjoy seeing you, I don't think it is wise.

-Miles

* * *

><p>Hermione had left Miles's last letter on her desk, frustrated with him. He still seemed so aloof. After this new information about his being a Death Eater, she had tried to look up records of the first war to see if his name was mentioned. The records that were kept barely mentioned any of Voldemort's followers, and most had died during the battle. She couldn't find anything about him from the last war either, but he had made it sound as though he wasn't a part of it. Or wasn't for long, at least.<p>

Checking her wristwatch, she noted she was running a bit late to meet Ginny. She quickly jumped up, grabbed her jacket and shoulder bag and called out a good-bye to Ron on her way out the door.

* * *

><p>"That's it, Hermione. What is going on with you?" Ginny slammed down her pint glass and gave Hermione a look full of scrutiny. Hermione froze a moment, wondering how Ginny could tell anything was amiss. Just then, the door to the pub opened and she jumped, sloshing a bit of her cider over the side of her glass. She bit her lip â€“ she may be just a bit jumpy. Realizing she couldn't hide from Ginny's investigative talents, Hermione sighed and gulped down the remainder of her drink. Ginny's eyes widened a bit.<p>

"Okay. I've been following someone." Hermione admitted. Ginny snorted.

"What? Following someone? For work?" She asked. Hermione shook her head.

"On my own time." Ginny raised a questioning eyebrow. "It all started back in September. I was walking up Portobello Road andâ€!"

Several minutes later, Hermione had finished her story with the attacker grabbing her outside the apartment building. Ginny seemed speechless for a few moments, eyes roaming over the table but otherwise completely still.

"Ginny?"

"Hold on, Hermione. I'll be just a moment." Ginny breathed. With that she rose from the table and wandered out of the pub. Hermione watched after her, not sure what exactly was happening.

Five minutes later she thought maybe Ginny needed some fresh air to process her story or maybe just needed a breather before she reprimanded Hermione for being such an idiot.

Ten minutes later, it occurred to her that perhaps Ginny was getting Harry and Ron. She began fidgeting nervously.

Fifteen minutes later she glanced up and saw Ginny at the door, waving Hermione over. Once she was in arm's reach of the younger witch, she was yanked out the door and around to the back of the building and was Apparated away.

"Where are we? What's going on?" Hermione asked, confused, after they arrived.

"Portobello Road, near that apartment building." Ginny replied, marching off in the correct direction. Hermione's heart skipped a beat. She didn't want to go back there and she certainly didn't want to deal with Harry after he discovered that she had put Ginny in a dangerous situation.

"Ginny, wait!" Hermione tried to stop, but Ginny was too determined. Once they were just around the corner, she ducked into a tiny alcove between buildings, heavily shaded by trees. She pulled something large and bulky out of her bag.

"Ginny, you didn't!" Hermione gasped. It had been years but she still easily recognized the item in her hands.

"It's Harry's cloak of invisibility. We're going to go find out who that arse is." Ginny said angrily.

"Oh, Ginny, this is so not necessary" Hermione started to walk away but Ginny grabbed her and yanked her back.

"Hermione. Get. Under. The. Cloak." Internally cursing herself for telling Ginny anything to begin with, she followed orders. There was no point arguing with her when she got like this.

Minutes later, they were moving slowly toward the third apartment entrance. Ginny quietly scanned the names.

"1A â€“ Hilman. 1B â€“ Leonard. 2A â€“ Serano. 2B â€“ Brighton. 3A" Hermione cut Ginny off with a gasp.

"What? What's wrong?" Ginny asked, worried.

Hermione's heart was hammering in her chest, breathing raggedly as

the details became clear. This street, this apartment building, apartment 2Bâ€| this was where Miles lived.

Hermione broke free from under the cloak, not checking to see if any muggles had just seen her appear out of thin air or not. She needed to get away. A few streets later, Ginny finally caught up to her â€" now visible â€" and gently pulled Hermione into a dark coffeehouse. Hermione was pushed into a worn armchair and sat numbly as Ginny grabbed them both some hot chocolate and returned, handing the drink to her friend, pulling a matching armchair close and looking concerned.

"Alright, Hermione, time to tell me the rest." She said softly. Hermione glanced up at her and immediately felt guilty. Though their letters had been innocent enough, she had said things she shouldn't have to a man other than her husbandâ€| and now she had to tell her sister-in-law about it.

7. Face-to-Face

A/N: Just another friendly reminder that I don't own any of this and make no money from it :)

* * *

><p>Once she had finished her tale, Ginny sat quietly, swirling the remains of her drink. Hermione relaxed back into her chair, suddenly exhausted.</p>

"Doâ€| do you still love my brother?" Ginny asked. Hermione immediately wanted to say yes, to reassure her. Something made her pause, however, and consider it.

"Yes," she admitted finally, "but I'm not sure if I still love him the way I used to." Ginny nodded slowly, finished her drink and then looked Hermione in the eyes.

"For someone who was once touted as 'the brightest witch of her age' you're rather an idiot, you know that?" Hermione smiled, relieved.

"I do in fact know that. I'm so sorry, Ginny."

"I'm not the one you should be apologizing to."

"I know. I'll talk to Ron. Really. I promise." Hermione reached over and squeezed her hand. Ginny nodded.

"Alright, now, are you sure the man you saw is the same man as this Miles character? What are you planning to do?"

* * *

><p>Hours later, Hermione was walking up to her front door in the quiet darkness of early morning. She felt as though a weight had lifted off of her shoulders â€" a release, from finally telling someone about everythingâ€| but she also felt emotionally drained. All she wanted was to go upstairs and to bed. Just as she was reaching for the doorknob, however, it swung open.</p>

"Where have you been?" Ron demanded. His face was a bit red â€“ clashing terribly with his hair and his clothing was disheveled. Hermione spotted Harry watching them from the hallway, his hair a bit more untidy than usual, a drink in his hand.

"Iâ€œI've been out with Ginny. You know that." She shifted uncomfortably.

"You should've been home hours ago."

"I know, I'm sorry about the time. We got to talking and lost track of the hour." She looked at Ron expectantly, waiting for him to move so she could walk inside.

"Who were you really with?" Ron's voice had dropped to a harsh whisper. Over his shoulder, Hermione saw Harry's head dip down before he began walking away, taking a gulp of his drink. She focused her eyes back on Ron's again.

"What do you mean? You know I was with Ginny." Ron took a step forward angrily and thrust a finger up at her for a moment before he exhaled deeply and shoved both hands through his hair. Hermione couldn't understand what was happening until Ron's hand dipped into his pocket and reappeared holding a wrinkled piece of paper. As he unfolded it, Hermione realized with horror that it was her last letter from Miles.

"'Hermione! You give me far more credit than I deserve. While I cannot say I wouldn't enjoy seeing you, I don't think it is wise.'" He spat out the words before he balled the letter up and held it so tightly that his knuckles turned white. "Who is Miles? That's where you really were tonight, wasn't it? He didn't give you the answer you wanted, so you forced it? Am I really that disappointing? You haven't seemed to mind the past several years!" Ron's voice was quivering with anger, his eyes flashing.

"Ron, I-" Hermione's own voice was thick with unshed tears, her lip quivering and her whole body shaking.

"Is this how little our life together matters to you? Do you hate me this much?" Ron's voice broke at the end.

"No, I could never hate you. Ron, you have to let me explain â€“ nothing is happening or has happened. He's simply an acquaintance of mine that I happen to write to. I've never met him in person."

"Then why did you want to see him?"

"Iâ€œI oh Ron, it's complicated." Hermione ran her hand over her face, still exhausted and not knowing where to begin.

"Tell me now, Hermione, or I'm leaving." She looked at him in shock. While he had every right to be upset, she would never have imagined him making this sort of threat.

"Alright! It'sâ€œ a long story, but basically I had been trying to find relatives of someone and was given his address. I started writing him asking questions and we just kept writing back and forth. It's all innocent, but I had asked if he wanted to meet me after he

revealed something he thought would make me hate him."

"And what was that?"

"Heâ€| wellâ€| I don't know ifâ€|" Ron scoffed and started to turn away.

"No, Ron, wait!" She reached out and grabbed his shoulder. "I'll tell you but you have to promise not to do anything about it."

"Tell me anyway." He said levelly. Hermione swallowed hard.

"Heâ€| he followed Voldemort for a time." She breathed.

"He was a Death Eater?" Ron practically yelled. Harry reentered the hall behind him.

"A very long time ago. I don't think he was in the Battle at Hogwarts though, and he's changed, Ron!" Ron snorted and pushed past Hermione, looking back and nodding at Harry.

"Ron? Where are you going?" Hermione felt cold dread in her belly as Ron and Harry were rounding the corner of their home, to their designated Apparition point. "Ron?"

"Sorry Hermione." Harry called softly as he followed her husband. In a flash, they had disappeared.

Hermione stood, stunned by this turn of events. Then, thinking quickly, she spotted and picked up the crumpled letter Ron had discarded on the lawn. Looking it over quickly, Hermione noted with some relief that neither his address nor last name were printed on the paper. However, if they were truly going to the other Aurors, as she suspected, they could most likely track him down.

She'd have to warn him. And she didn't have much time. With a deep breath, she realized what she had to do. She sprinted to the Apparition point and landed just off Portobello Road, only pausing a moment to make sure she had her footing before running to his apartment. The door stopped her only for a moment as she cast Alohomora before quickly making her way up to 2B.

It all seemed so surreal now. This man whom she had been writing for nearly three months, the man she'd been following for a bit longerâ€| they were more than likely the same man. And she was about to come face-to-face with him. She shook as she lifted a fist and knocked.

For a few moments, there was only silence. Then she heard a series of locks click open and felt a distinct shift in the air as wards were removed. Finally, the knob turned and the door creaked open.

8. Forgiveness

Hermione felt her heart constrict when she saw his face. So many emotions were running through her. She wasn't ready to face her attacker, wasn't sure if she was ready to meet Miles, and wasn't completely sure just who this man was. He certainly looked like how she remembered Severus Snape â€" just older, and wore muggle

clothing.

"What are you doing here?" The man asked. A chill went up Hermione's spine. She remembered that raspy voice. It wasn't Severus's voice though â€" instead of the deep, silky voice she remembered, it was rough and somewhat strangled sounding. She tilted her head to the side.

"Miles?" She asked quietly. He just blinked at her, an unreadable expression on his face. Hermione's eyes dropped to his neck and her breath caught. She almost involuntarily stepped forward, her hand rising to his shoulder and gently pulled the fabric aside. The small imperfection Hermione had spotted turned out to be the tip of a huge mangled and puckered scar. She inhaled sharply and turned her head, looking up at him with just inches between their faces.

"Severus?" It was more a statement than a question now. His eyes roamed over her face before he nodded slightly. She let out a shaky breath and felt her eyes fill with tears. All the memories from the battle came rushing back and overwhelmed her. He gently put his arm around her and led her inside, depositing her in a stiff chair and handing over a tissue. She hadn't noticed the tears streaming down her face until then.

"Whâ€| whereâ€| whatâ€| howâ€|" Hermione stuttered, unsure of where to start.

"It's a long story." He replied. This gave Hermione a bit of dÃ©jÃ vu â€" she had told Ron that her relationship with Miles was a long story. She suddenly remembered Ron and Harry rushing off. She bolted to her feet, eyes wide.

"We have to go. You need to get out of here!" Hermione breathed. He asked no questions, simply rose and followed her as she rushed out of the apartment. Mind racing, she pulled him into a dark alley and Apparated away.

"Where are we?" He asked as he took in his surroundings.

"My parent's house." Hermione replied, as she moved about quickly making sure they were alone. Her parents were away visiting family and the house was quiet. It would continue to be vacant for another few days, so she had some time to think of what to do.

For now though, she wanted answers. Guiding him to the living room, she quickly brewed some strong tea and they sat, Hermione fixing him with a scrutinizing glare. The sun began creeping up and casting pale light into the room, making his face appear even more gaunt and pallid.

"You really are Severus?" He nodded. "How did you survive? We were right there. You went stillâ€| no one has heard from you since thenâ€| you were dead. I was sure of it."

"I had madeâ€| preparations. Riddle wasn't someone you wanted to underestimate. I had lost a lot of blood but once the potions I had taken began to work, I came-to rather quickly. From there, I simply snuck away and hid out until things quieted. Then I was free to start a new life."

"As Miles?"

"Yes."

"Why Miles Brighton?" Hermione asked, suddenly curious.

"My family vacationed to Brighton a few times when I was a child; it is one of my only happy memories. As for "Miles" it means "soldier", which I thought fitting as I always seem to be doing someone else's bidding...fighting someone else's war."

Hermione simply sat and stared at the man she had long thought dead. Now seeing him in front of her, hearing his story and putting together pieces of the puzzle, she felt a bit daft for not seeing it earlier. Everything in hindsight was just a bit too coincidental.

"Why did you tell me to stop following you?" She asked suddenly.

"Why were you following me?"

"Because I thought you might have been a brother or relative. I wanted to reach out if you were."

"I didn't want you getting too close until I knew if I could trust you or not." He said, eyes narrowing at her.

"Trust me? With what?"

"My secret."

"Of course you could. You should know that after all we were put through back then."

"Yes, but I am also aware that you are a grown woman now, and married to an Auror; the best friend of the head Auror to be precise. To let it slip that I was a Death Eater too soon would have meant leaving a bit before I had planned."

"You were planning to leave?" Hermione felt a stab of sadness, though she wasn't entirely sure why.

"I've tried so hard to conceal my true identity all these years; once you knew I figured my time would have run out."

"Ron and Harry are looking for you." Hermione admitted.

"Are they now? Whatever for?" He replied sarcastically.

"He found your last letter." She said quietly. His hand froze in midair as it was lifting the teacup to his mouth.

"Oh?"

"He was less than thrilled as you might imagine."

"I don't know what you are doing with that idiot Weasley anyways." Severus said grumpily.

"I loved him, Severus." His eyes snapped up to meet hers, some strange emotion in them.

"Loved?"

She hadn't even realized she had used past tense. She swallowed hard and thought about her conversation with Ginny.

"Yes," she said slowly, "Loved. Iâ€|I think you've helped me see that." They just looked at one another for a few moments. Hermione's stomach was doing somersaults as she stared into his deep, dark eyes. Throughout the years she had noticed from time to time attractiveness there in his face, but now, she couldn't remember not finding him to be handsome. Perhaps it was that she found his wisdom, sacrifice, and maturity attractive. Ron had never truly seemed to grow up and it is true that the more you know a person they tend to become more or less attractive to you based on their personality.

"May I still call you Hermione?" He asked quietly. She felt something akin to butterflies in her stomach as she nodded.

"Yes. And may I call you Severus?"

"When we're alone, yes. If I am to stay, I must stick with my alias publicly."

"But Severus, I'm sure if we went to talk with Kingsley â€""

"He would throw me in Azkaban without a second thought. Just like all the others." His voice rose. "Do not think for a moment that the Order would protect me."

"But we all know now why you did the things you did. We know why you killed Albusâ€|why you became a double agentâ€|" Hermione let her eyes drop to the floor, embarrassed. She had been one of the few people that Harry allowed to watch Severus's memories.

"So you know what I did to Lily." He said flatly.

"Yes. But I know why you said it as well."

"Really? Then why did I?" Severus asked, his hands shaking, making the china rattle.

Hermione put her own teacup down, crossed to him and sank to her knees in front of him, moving his tea to the side table. He looked down at her, his face full of emotion.

"Severus, we all make mistakes. We all wish we could take some of them back, but that's not how it works. Sometimes these terrible things happen to change us in the future. Look at what you did â€" because of that one regret you saved so many."

"No. It wasn't until I knew she was in danger that I changed my ways." He wouldn't look Hermione in the eyes, so she simply reached up and took his hands in her own.

"What you did was wrong, yes. But like I said in my letters, the past is the past. We cannot change it. But we can grow and learn from it. And you have done just that." He started shaking his head. "I forgive

you, Severus."

Upon hearing her words, he went still. Then ever so slowly, he turned his head towards her and lifted his eyes from the floor. A few moments passed in which they looked at each other, Hermione unsure of what he was thinking. Something cold on her cheek made her freeze until she realized Severus had lifted a hand to caress her face. The skin he was touching tingled and grew warm. His gaze dropped to her lips and she felt the tension between them come alive with electricity. Her eyes dropped to his lips as well, and she found herself leaning toward him, just as he leaned towards her.

"Shit." She whispered suddenly, breaking the spell between them and moving away from him. "We have to figure out what to do about Ron. I don't know how quickly they'll track you, but we need a plan."

Severus nodded, his breath still a bit uneven.

9. The Aurors

A/N: First off, a huge thank you to all of you reviewing. I love reading every single one - your questions help shape the story and I love getting feedback! Also a big thank you to ****scrumptiousinternetllama** **for some insight which went into this chapter :) Hope you enjoy!

* * *

><p>In the end, Severus had assured her that he would be safe enough at her parents' home for a few days. She assisted him in putting up wards, showed him where everything was and then said her goodbyes. He had remained surprisingly compliant, merely nodding when she spoke to him and following her around the house with his hands folded behind his back.</p>

She left the house, walked quickly to a small bakery on the corner a few streets down and leaned against it, sinking to the ground and putting her head in her hands. It was now mid-morning and she was exhausted. The stress of her confrontation with Ron, of finding Severus, of trying to hide him, not to mention the fact that she had been up for over 24 hours made her head spin.

Her first thought was to return to her house. But she couldn't quite bring herself to return to the home that she and Ronald had built. Her next thought was of Ginny. She hadn't told her the entire truth about "Miles" having been a Death Eater, but she knew the rest. Perhaps Hermione could talk to her about it. And also, Harry would be more sympathetic; maybe he would listen to reason. She wouldn't tell them who "Miles" really was, but she'd attempt to defuse the situation nonetheless.

In no time at all she had arrived at Ginny's and was sitting at the kitchen table with her, steaming cups of coffee in front of them both. She had told her that Miles had been a Death Eater and Ron had seen the letter and taken off.

"I was wondering what happened. Harry sent a message saying they'd be out all night and most of today. Do they know where he lives?"

"I don't think so. It wasn't on his letter and Ron doesn't have any that I sent to him." Hermione looked down at her mug, tapping her thumb on the rim. "I really didn't mean to hurt Ron. I just wanted a friend."

"I understand. You just didn't go about it quite right." Ginny said matter-of-factly. Hermione nodded.

"I know. I need to talk to Ron and apologize. But Ginny, what do I do? I don't know how to stop him. He seemed like he was out for blood last night."

"Well, he probably is, Hermione."

"Yes, but Sevâ€" Miles isn't a threat to anyone." Ginny gave her a suspicious look as a thick silence hung between them.

"Are you sure? How can you be?" Ginny finally asked. Hermione just looked at her friend for a moment. Nothing escaped Ginny and she could already tell her slip-up hadn't gone unnoticed.

"I can't tell you right now, but I know he is telling the truth." Ginny's eyes narrowed. A few moments passed before either of them spoke.

"Okay." Ginny said.

"Okay?" Hermione was honestly a bit flabbergasted that Ginny gave in so quickly.

"Okay. I trust you. You may not be making the smartest choices lately, but I trust you." Hermione rose from her chair to give her friend a hug.

Hours later, the two women were sitting on the sofa, deep in discussion about what the children had written home about Hagrid's interesting classes when the front door opened. They shared a glance at each other as they heard footsteps coming down the hallway.

"What are you doing here?" Ron asked tiredly as he and Harry entered the room.

"Talking with Ginny." Hermione replied. Harry cast a wary glance between them and then went to sit next to Ginny, pulling her into an embrace against him.

"I thought you were at home. I'll go." He turned to leave, but Hermione rose quickly and crossed the space between them, placing a hand on his arm.

"I'll come with you." She said softly.

* * *

><p>It was late afternoon and once again Hermione was exhausted. She still hadn't been able to get any sleep, and the caffeine from the morning's coffee with Ginny had worn off some time ago. She and Ron had been sitting at their kitchen table, the wooden chairs long since

uncomfortable, talking through things. She had told him everything about the man in London, and the letters to Miles â€“ just leaving out anything to do with Severus himself.<p>

"Are you going to tell me where he lives?" Ron asked.

"You'll use it to find him and put him in Azkaban."

"Hermione," Ron was visibly getting frustrated. "He was a Death Eater. Do you remember them? Do you remember what they did to you? To Lupin, Tonks, Fred?" His voice broke at the mention of his late brother, which still hurt him to think about.

"Ron, I know. It was horrible. But Miles is different. He's changed. He deserves a second chance; forgiveness."

"Maybe. But first he deserves a trial."

"Ron—"

"No, Hermione. I'm sorry that he's your friend," Ron spat out the word, "but he needs to be held accountable. And that's my job." With that, he rose and walked out of the kitchen, leaving Hermione feeling hopeless.

* * *

><p>It was another few days before Hermione returned to her parents' home. She wanted to stay on top of what Ron and Harry knew about Miles and she also had to get back to her job â€“ not that she was much use, her mind occupied with other things as it was.<p>

And then finally it was Saturday â€“ one week before Christmas, and she was able to go out under the premise that there was more shopping to be done. She and Ron had fallen back into their typical routine and he had simply nodded and ducked back behind his paper that morning. She did in fact plan to pick up a special gift for him that day. But, her main goal was to stop in and check on Severus.

When she arrived, arms filled with some groceries and toiletries, she found him looking quite at home in an armchair reading a thick book. He glanced up at her when she entered, and then quickly moved to take the items from her into the kitchen.

"Thank you." She said quietly. It was still so strange having Severus Snape in her childhood home.

"Nâ€|" His voice made a strange gravely sound as he tried to speak. He rubbed the side of his neck a moment, cleared his throat and tried again, this time managing a few words in his now typical raspy voice. "No, thank you. You didn't need to go to all this trouble for me."

"Well, you do need to eat." Hermione said, beginning to put things away.

"I've managed fine with little for several years."

She finished putting away the groceries and then turned, taking in

his slender form as he was examining the other items she had brought. Tilting her head, she was suddenly filled with questions and remembered how he used to call her anâ€¢!

"Insufferable know-it-all." She giggled. He looked up, startled.

"Pardon?"

"That's what you used to call me, remember?" His eyes softened a bit.

"Yes. Well, that's what you were." He said gruffly. "All those damned questions. You very nearly drove me mad." Hermione laughed outright at that. Severus just looked at her, a slight softening (and possible upturn?) of his straight lips barely visible.

"It's true, I am a curious person."

"Curiosity killed the cat you know." He replied dryly. She smirked, dropped her gaze to the floor and bit her lip. She wasn't quite sure now how to ask him the questions building up in her brain. Severus suddenly sighed deeply and sank down into a chair.

"Well?" He asked.

"Well what?"

"Ask away. You're bound to explode at some point otherwise." Hermione smiled and sat across from him.

"Why did you continue writing me? Or even begin to write me at all?"

"I told you. Sometimes I find myself wishing for someone to converse with. And it just so happens that you are one of the few people in this world I would accept as a companionâ€¢ or as you say, _friend._" He said "friend" as if it was a new word, sounding it out strangely.

"Andâ€¢ and your voice? Is that because of Nagini?"

"Yes. As you saw, she left me quite disfigured. I couldn't protect myself against _everything._" Hermione frowned as she thought of that night, watching him still and then running off back to the castle.

"I'm so sorry." She breathed.

"Whatever for?"

"For leaving you." She reached out to touch his hand, his eyes dropping to and fixating on her fingers.

"You thought I was dead. It's quite reasonable for you to have left me."

"Even so, I am sorry." His eyes rose once again to meet hers.

"I forgive you." He echoed her earlier words.

They continued talking for several minutes in which she learned that he had initially laid low, grabbing money he had stashed away in his home, living in a cave not too far from Hogwarts and living off of animals he was able to capture. He was wary of using any magic until the search for the remaining Death Eaters had died down.

After a few months when it started getting cold out, he changed his appearance a bit, took his fake persona, sold the house and quickly got a job brewing potions. Remotely of course. He also began sending out inquiries for private clients, only communicating through letters and packages so as to avoid being recognized.

He had lived that very routine life until he received her first letter. Initially thinking not to respond, he later decided he would attempt to convince her to give up her search. Then, he found he enjoyed communicating with someone personally rather than through business and continued. He had panicked when he kept seeing her follow him, however, and acted rashly, hoping to keep her away so he could continue living his secretive life.

"That letter? the one when you first told me that you were lonely? what happened? It was so different from the rest?" She asked. His gaze dropped to the table where he focused on his folded hands.

"I wrote it on Halloween night." He said quietly. She nodded.

"Yes I know, Harry and Ginny were there. They always come over and spend it with us." He looked up at her, weariness upon his face.

"And why is that?"

"It's the anniversary of? oh." Hermione breathed. "Lily." He nodded and once again dropped his gaze to the table.

"Oh Severus." Her heart broke for him. To carry that sort of love for someone for so many years after they were gone, and not have anyone to share it with? she couldn't begin to imagine.

Just then the front door flew open. Hermione's head snapped toward the sound while Severus leapt to his feet and had his wand at the ready. A few sets of loud footsteps sounded down the hall and Hermione began to slowly stand, her heart racing. Around the corner came Ron, Harry, and two other Aurors, wands out and pointing at Severus. He lifted his chin slowly and lowered his wand.

"Ronald. What have you done?" Hermione's voice was a harsh whisper as her eyes filled with tears.

But he didn't hear her nor did Harry. They were both staring in shock at the man they thought they had watched die.

10. Wizengamot

Monday morning Hermione woke with the sun. Her nose wrinkled at the starchy stiffness of the sheets on her body as she stretched and yawned. Sitting up, she looked at her surroundings. The standard flat

screen TV and dresser stood directly across from the bed, desk off to the left with a cushioned desk chair. A small armchair stood to the left of the bed, by the window, and a small mini fridge with a microwave and coffee maker stood to the right, next to the hall which led to the closet, bathroom and door.

She'd been here for the last two nights and wasn't sure how long she would be staying. As she rubbed her face and began making her way to the shower, she relived the events of the past 36 hours.

~8~

"Professor Snape?" Harry asked incredulously.

"I am no longer your professor, am I, Potter?"

"How are you alive? Where have you been? How?" Harry finally looked over at Hermione, eyes widening. "_This _is Miles?"

Hermione nodded. Ron's huge eyes shifted slowly from Severus to Hermione and back again, his mouth hanging open. Harry lowered his wand hesitantly.

"You knew all this time?" He asked her.

"No. No, I really just found out the day after Ron found his letter."

"You're you greasy bloody slimy GIT!" Ron spat out, stuttering in anger. His face was turning red as he glared murderously at Severus. "You chose MY wife? The mother of my children to sink your oily little hooks into?"

Ron was flat out bellowing now, the hand holding his wand shaking. Harry gently reached over and guided his hand down, away from the man before them. Hermione glanced over at Severus who had, if it was possible, turned a shade paler. He was looking at her, a pained expression on his face.

"You have children?" His voice was barely audible. Unable to speak, she just nodded at him. He looked down for a moment, swallowed hard and then looked Harry in the eye, flipping his wand around to hand it to him.

"I surrender." He said simply.

Late Saturday night Ron had returned from the Ministry, clearly still angry. He slammed the door on his way in and simply stood and glared at Hermione. They had argued for hours. She didn't know what he was trying to get out of her "she had said in as many ways as she could that she hadn't known it was Severus, there was nothing inappropriate between them, she hadn't cheated on him, etc. But he just kept saying the same thing over and over.

"Gods, Hermione. As soon as the tracker went off and I saw where you were I-"

"Tracker?" Hermione interrupted him, anger swirling deep in her belly. Ron's face softened a little, giving him a slightly guilty

look. "What tracker?"

"Hermione, look—"

"What tracker, Ronald?" She said in a low, dangerous voice. Ron sighed heavily and ran his hands over his face.

"The tracker I put on you. I did it the day before you went shopping. The moment I saw you had gone to your parents' house I knew something was funny. And then we worked it out from there."

A long, tense silence hung in the air. Ron had been looking at the chair he was leaning on, but he risked a glance up at her. She was utterly speechless. All at once the anger threatening to boil over within her disappeared and she was left with a staggering weariness. When she opened her mouth, nothing came out. She just shook her head and walked past him, out the front door and through the city until she found a suitable hotel where she promptly fell asleep for no less than 14 hours.

~8~

Sunday found her numbly sitting in her hotel room. She couldn't go back to Ron, not yet anyways. Severus had been taken to a holding cell at the Ministry until he could have a hearing early on Monday. She also couldn't go to see him until Monday. She had thought about going to talk with Ginny but she was just too worn out by this whole ordeal.

Now, as she finished buttoning her winter coat, she felt the first bit of vigor she'd felt in days. Today she had off of work as the children would be coming home. It also worked in her favor that it gave her time to go and see Severus before the hearing — maybe even talk to Harry about the details.

By the time she had been granted clearance and made her way down to the holding cell he was in, there was less than an hour before his hearing. A burly looking wizard led her there and slowly took down the spells and wards concealing and enclosing him. Finally he was left with simple iron bars which were unlocked and opened for her to enter.

"Hello." She said softly, sitting on a rickety wooden chair across from the bed he was seated upon. He looked up at her solemnly, dark circles under his eyes.

"Hello."

"How are you? Are they treating you okay?"

"Everything is fine, Hermione. You needn't fret." His voice was scratchier than usual and somewhat robotic.

"Are you nervous?" Severus looked down at his folded hands for a while.

"I've accepted my fate. I knew long ago that if by some small chance I survived Riddle, I'd live out my days in Azkaban. I've certainly done enough to deserve it."

"Severus!" She scolded. "That's no way to think. You must stay positive. You never know how-"

"Hermione." He barked. She looked into his eyes and saw he had given up. "Stop. I'm not worth getting riled up over. Go home."

"No."

"Go. Home." He hissed. Hermione folded her arms and lifted her chin.

"I'm not a child anymore. I haven't been for a long time. I'll do what I please." He shook his head, narrowing his eyes at her. His mouth opened but the guard approached before he could say a word.

"It's time." The guard said. Unlocking the door, he cast a binding spell on Severus's arms and began to lead him away. Hermione followed behind but at the door to the courtroom, another guard blocked her entry.

"Let me through." She demanded.

"No one allowed but the Wizengamot and the Aurors who caught him, I'm afraid, Mrs. Weasley." He said. Hermione looked past him and saw Ron and Harry watching Severus cross to the center and sit. Harry caught her eye and attempted a half smile, but Ron simply sat and glared at the man on trial. As the large, heavy door began to close, Severus cast one last glance behind him, to where she was standing. She managed a small smile before the door blocked her view of him and then closed securely.

11. Keeping up Appearances

A/N: Just wanted to say again that I am going to continue trying my best to get a chapter up every day but currently have a health issue going on in the family so please do forgive me if there is a day here or there without a new one.

Also, this chapter feels a bit like filler but I wanted to include all of these moments before getting to the big stuff!

* * *

><p>It seemed like ages until anything happened. Her breath caught in her chest as she watched the door open slowly, expecting to see Severus. But it was Harry who exited the courtroom instead. He nodded at the guard stationed outside in passing and approached Hermione.</p>

"Well?" Hermione breathed.

"They deemed it 'inconclusive'." Harry said, rubbing the back of his neck. Hermione felt a nervous chill creep up her spine.

"Andâ€¦and what does that mean?" He sighed.

"It means there'll be another trial. They want the Order members to

be there to give testimony and include Kingsley."

"How will that be different than today's hearing?"

"The vote was too close. So many members of the Wizengamot are distrustful of Severus and then the Aurors had to vote as wellâ€|" He trailed off.

"How did the Aurors vote?" She knew the answer, but wanted to hear him say it.

"I was the only one that voted in his favor." Harry said quietly. Hermione nodded, jaw tightening. "Hermione, give him a chance. I know he's been an arse lately but after all this time he deserves to be heard. And then there are the children."

He was right. Ron did deserve to have his side of things heard. He wasn't completely in the wrong but he wasn't in the clear either. Everything had gone from black and white to gray so quickly. As for the children, she didn't want to disrupt them. She knew she had to talk to Ronald and go back home before the days end for their children's' sake.

"Where is he?" She asked, looking expectantly at the door.

"He's working with the guards, he shouldn't be long."

"Severus?" She asked, confused.

"No, Ron. Weren't you asking about him?" Hermione dropped her eyes to the floor, face flushing hot. "I guess not." He said slowly. Hermione swallowed hard, feeling like the lowest person on earth. Looking up, she caught Harry's look of warning and disappointment.

"The trial isn't until the New Year. Severus will be held in Azkaban until then." Hermione's heart dropped. Her head turned towards the door and she tried to rush towards it. The guard stepped in front of the door and Harry put his arm around her, holding her in place.

"Let me go, please, Harry. I just want to see him for a moment, to tell him it'll all be okay; to say goodbye." She pleaded.

"They're already gone." Harry said quietly. She stopped fighting and turned to look at him. The sympathy in his expression did nothing to help the sadness she felt in her heart, or the guilt twisting her stomach.

Ron and Hermione had spent the past few hours holed up in their bedroom with the intention of talking through things but mainly Hermione had just sat quietly on the bed and Ron had been pacing the floor, muttering quietly from time to time. Finally Hermione stood and watched Ron until he stopped and looked back at her.

"Let's just agree to get along while the children are here. It's their holiday break and we can't let our personal issues affect them." She said in a weary voice. Ron stared at her long and hard.

"Alright, 'Mione." He finally replied. His voice sounded rather weary

as well. With a small smile, Hermione exited the room, heading to the kitchen to start dinner.

Rose and Hugo returned home full of stories and excitement. They had a big dinner and talked all evening until the kids could barely keep their eyes open. Once they had gone up to bed, Ron retreated to the living room while Hermione cleaned up. Afterwards, Ron went up to bed and Hermione headed for the guest room.

~8~

Christmas morning the children rushed downstairs and began tearing open gifts, same as always. But to Hermione, everything felt different. She had been careful to wake early every morning so no one would see her leaving the guest room and though she and Ron didn't speak when they were alone, she thought they were keeping up appearances rather well. Still, there was a definite shift in the air which made it all feel tainted and strange.

They followed tradition and all headed to Harry and Ginny's for a big Christmas Dinner that evening; Hermione and Ron immediately splitting ways as the boys all gathered for games in the living room while all the girls headed to the kitchen.

A few hours later they were all stuffed, the dishes were cleared away, and everyone was relaxing. Hugo, Lily and Albus were off comparing gifts while Rose and James were deep into a game of chess. Harry and Ron had taken a bottle of Firewhiskey into the other room and Ginny and Hermione were curled up on the sofa.

"How are you?" Ginny asked.

"I'm fine, how are you?" Hermione replied, amused at the blasÃ© question.

"Fine. I was asking about the hearing though; and Severus." Hermione's glanced over at the kids quickly, ensuring they weren't eavesdropping.

"Erm, fine I suppose. Why?" Ginny shot her a look.

"Hermione, I've known you for years. I knew you weren't telling me the whole truth about "Miles" and I heard you almost call him Severus. When Harry told me about finding the two of you that day, I put things together. So how long have you been in love with him?" Ginny said this all rather matter-of-factly and then took a sip of her drink, gazing calmly at Hermione. She, on the other hand, was anything but calm.

"Love?" Hermione spluttered. "I'm not in love with him. I barely know the man."

"Actually, I'd say you know him quite well."

"It doesn't matter, I'm not in love with him."

"Alright, then how long have you been attracted to him?" Hermione scoffed, incredulous.

"I'm not, Ginny!" Ginny just raised an eyebrow in her

direction.

"Hermione, it's alright. I know you and Ron haven't been doing well. I want you both to be happy because I love you both" if that means you not being my sister-in-law any longer, so be it. I just hope that you don't stand in your own way. Listen to your heart."

Ginny squeezed her hand and stood, walking across the room to refill her drink. She watched the younger witch leave, her mind whirling. Could she be right? Something made her glance to her left and found Rose looking at her curiously. Once they made eye contact, however, her daughter turned back to her game, leaving Hermione alone in her thoughts.

~8~

It was the day that the children were returning to Hogwarts " Ron and Hugo had gone ahead while Rose said she needed to double check her bag. Hermione waited with her, looking around the train station and fondly remembering her own days excitedly rushing through the station to get to the train.

"Mum?" Hermione turned to look at Rose, who was standing beside her cart, facing her.

"What is it? Did you forget something?" Hermione checked her watch, wondering if they'd have time to go back home.

"No. I wanted to talk to you."

"Oh? Well, the train is about to leave, dear" can this wait?"

"Mum, I heard you and Aunt Ginny talking at Christmas." Hermione's heart sank.

"You did?" Rose nodded somberly. "I'm so sorry, Rose. It's not what it sounds like and Aunt Ginny doesn't know what she was talking about."

"Mum, it's okay. I know something has changed. You and dad aren't the same anymore, and I know you were sleeping in the guest room. I don't know exactly what is going on but whatever it is, Hugo and I will be fine. You've raised us both to be strong and independent and I look out for him anyways. If you and dad are happier apart, that's what you should do. You both deserve it."

Hermione's eyes were full of tears as she felt her heart surge with pride at her daughter's words. She was certainly no longer a child but a young woman now. She felt terrible that she had caught on to what was going on but felt a bit relieved that she was taking it so well. She pulled Rose into a tight embrace.

"You aren't my little girl anymore, are you?" She asked tearfully. Rose shook her head.

"No, I'm not. I'm fifteen, mum. At my age you were battling Death Eaters. I can handle my parents breaking up." Hermione pulled back and caressed Rose's face.

"You know we both love you. So, so much." Rose nodded. Hermione smiled, ran her hand through one of Rose's stray curls and sighed. "You really ought to get going. Dad and Hugo will be wondering what we've been up to."

"Don't worry mum, I won't tell Hugo anything." With that, the young girl grabbed her things and walked confidently through the barrier. Hermione hung back only a moment, realizing she had a lot to think about.

End
file.